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THE LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

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FIRST PRESENTED
IN NEW YORK
BY THE
BEN GREET PLAYERS
CHRISTMASTIDE
1909

CHARACTERS

CARISTON, a Greek Poet
GLAUCUS, a friend of Cariston
POMPILIUS, a young Roman, nephew to Caesar
A JEW, a Master in Israel
FAUSTINA, daughter of the noble Roman Callust
CORDELIA, handmaiden to Faustina
THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE
A MAIDEN
THE VOICE OF THE VIRGIN MARY
SHEPHERDS, ROMAN SOLDIERS, JEWISH WOMEN AND OTHERS
THE VIRGIN AND THE CHILD ARE NEVER SEEN

Note on pronunciation of proper names. Cariston is pronounced Cariss-ton; Pompilius is pronounced Pompil-ius; Faustina is pronounced Fows-teena.

PART ONE

THE NATIVITY

THE LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

PART ONE

SCENE ONE

Time: The evening of the night when Christ was born.

Setting: The Town of Bethlehem in Judea. A room in the Inn.

A plain bare room with sombre grey walls; two small windows from which may be seen the distant hills and the open country illumined by the light of the full moon. There is a door to the left and one to the right. The room is lighted by hanging lamps of crude workmanship; it is strewn with boxes, etc.

Upon a rude table there are some flowers, a portable mirror of polished metal, and various toilet articles used by a Roman lady of rank in the First Century.

Before the mirror is seated FAUSTINA, *a noble Roman maiden, the daughter of* CALLUST; *she is very young; she wears a close-fitting underdress of white.*

Her handmaiden, CORDELIA, *older than* FAUSTINA, *is arranging the pearls in* FAUSTINA'S *hair.*

FAUSTINA

Did they bring water from the well?

CORDELIA (*scornfully*)

A few drops, Lady.

FAUSTINA

Bah!—I would we were in Jerusalem. This town must have been made before Romulus was born. Jerusalem was barbarous enough—but, if one cannot be in Rome, it is better than Bethlehem.

CORDELIA

Noble Faustina, you must follow your Father.

FAUSTINA

Am I not here? When the Tetrarch is minded to come and the Court follows, think you I would stay behind?

To-night is merrier—the Gods be praised! All the Romans in Judea will be at the Herodian Mount. My Father has gone to salute Herod; our faithful slaves and you, for modesty, will bear me to the feast. I meet my Father at the palace.

(CORDELIA *selects a red flower and places it in* FAUSTINA'S *hair.*)

FAUSTINA (*studying her hair in the mirror*)

More to the right—so—think you this flower is too red? My hair, remember, is not dark.

CORDELIA

Sunshine and shadow in one—I never saw such hair!

FAUSTINA (*smiling*)

In truth, 'tis not common amongst the Romans; my Mother was a— Hark! A knock; go to the door.

(CORDELIA *opens the door at the right; the* INNKEEPER'S WIFE *appears.*)

THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE (*making an obeisance*)
I would speak with your mistress.

FAUSTINA
Speak to Cordelia—she knows my mind—I am importantly engaged.

THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE
There is a woman at the door of the Inn.

FAUSTINA (*aside*)
What is that to me?

THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE
She has come up from Nazareth with her husband to be taxed, she is with child and her time is accomplished, her hour is near.

CORDELIA (*attempting to close the door*)
Do not parley; my Lady waits.

THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE (*putting her hand upon the door*)
But, hear me. The woman faints with weariness—and there is no room in the Inn—not one.

CORDELIA (*interrupting*)
Let her go elsewhere, then.

FAUSTINA (*studying the flower in her hair*)
It is too dark—it overshades the pearls.

THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE
There is no elsewhere, save some furlongs hence; 'tis piteous to see her—fairer than a lily—and as frail. If she be not cared for in her hour she will die.

FAUSTINA (*impatiently*)
Cordelia, I wish to change the flower.

THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE
I have bethought me that, perchance—

CORDELIA
Out with it, Woman.

THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE
Perchance, your Lady would give up, to this poor woman, one of her rooms—she has so many.

CORDELIA (*scornfully*)
It is not for my Lady to give up.

FAUSTINA (*shrugging her shoulders*)
Dear Juno! I am far too crowded as it is. These rooms are tiny—tiny, each, as a bee's cell.

THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE (*stepping nearer and reaching out her hand appealingly*)
Lady—besides the rooms your noble Father uses, you have this room, your room for sleeping, your handmaiden's room, and a room to hold your boxes. Can you not give me one—one for the weary woman at the door? She is far spent.

FAUSTINA (*laughing*)
So is the night; the feasting will be done if we do not make haste.

CORDELIA
Insolence! Do you not know that the noble Faustina is a great Lady? It passes bearing that you should dare to ask a daughter of the mighty Callust to give her room to one of the rabble. Callust shall be informed of this. Your husband—

THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE (*with agitation*)
Oh, no—not he—he did not send me—he would be exceeding wroth if he knew that I had come; but I am a woman—

CORDELIA (*severely*)
I'll not forget to tell.

FAUSTINA (*good humoredly*)
Spare her, Cordelia.

THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE (*imploringly*)
Lady—the woman dies before our door.

CORDELIA
Silence! Vex not Faustina's ears.

FAUSTINA
Poor thing! The rabble always die like rats; I would it were not so—it hurts me.

THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE
Then Lady—

FAUSTINA (*interrupting*)
I *wish* I had another room! I would gladly give it to her.

CORDELIA
Go—I shut the door.

FAUSTINA
Cordelia—wait! Give her some sesterces, first, for the poor woman. I do not see why the sick are ever in the street. (*Changing the flower in her hair to a lighter one.*) Yes—the mellow pink tones better with the lustre of the pearls.

(CORDELIA *puts her hand to the little bag at her side.*)

THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE (*lifting her hand protestingly*)
I did not ask for money!

CORDELIA (*scornfully*)
Do not the herd ever hanker for it?

THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE (*with dignity*)
The Woman of Nazareth is a daughter of Israel—she needs no Roman coin.
(THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE *makes an obeisance and goes out.*)

CORDELIA (*bowing sarcastically toward the retreating figure*)
In truth, a very maggot of magnificence.
(CORDELIA *closes the door.*)

FAUSTINA
Thanks be to Mercury, she is gone. I do not like to be disturbed—nor to have your mind diverted in the momentous event of my hair. See—Cordelia—I have changed the flower.

CORDELIA (*readjusting the flower*)
Noble Faustina, you can play upon the lute, and upon the harp and you can play upon the hearts of men, but when you would have flowers in your hair then you must ask of your humble Cordelia.

FAUSTINA (*laughing*)
Humble—you humble! You are as proud as a peacock—and you have as many eyes. Have you seen the son of the mighty Plutonius, to-day?

CORDELIA (*looking at* FAUSTINA *slyly*)
No—but I passed Cariston the Greek.

FAUSTINA (*starting*)
The poet Cariston!—he is here?

CORDELIA
You are here, Lady. No moth stays long from the flame of the torch.

FAUSTINA
Were his eyes blue?

CORDELIA
Sooth, I know not.

FAUSTINA (*softly, half aside*)
I know—they are as blue as the sea we crossed when we came hither. And yet as dark as the night upon the mountains in Judea— Ah!

CORDELIA
He spoke to me in passing—I am your handmaiden.

FAUSTINA
He is ever gracious.

CORDELIA
Gracious— Yea, but he eats a poor man's fare. If he should take a woman to wife, she would live upon lentils, very like.

FAUSTINA
Ah, me—

CORDELIA (*watching the effect of her words*)
Whereas, if the noble Pompilius, son of Plutonius,

should take a wife, she would feed upon nightingales' tongues.

FAUSTINA (*softly, half aside*)
I should rather hear the nightingales sing.

CORDELIA
The wife of Cariston would dress in homespun—
The lady of Pompilius would be showered with pearls
—she would have the right to wear the purple in her robe.

FAUSTINA (*contemplatively*)
The purple!

CORDELIA
The noble Pompilius is your Father's friend—a mighty Roman warrior.

FAUSTINA
Only a warrior! Cariston is a poet!

CORDELIA
Pompilius is kin to Caesar. Lady, your noble Father—

FAUSTINA (*impatiently*)
Oh, my Father—well do I know the word that he has dinned into my ear.

CORDELIA (*aside*)
And into mine to say to her.

FAUSTINA (*studying herself in the mirror*)
You have outdone yourself—and now—my robe.

CORDELIA (*going out by the door at left, looking back*)
In sooth, those pearls beseem you—

FAUSTINA (*walking to the window and looking out*)
Cariston! Ever to my thought—you come—to trick my destiny! Pompilius—a palace—the right to sit before Caesar—Rome at my feet! The picture stirs me like new wine.
When I think of Pompilius I feel myself a queen. (*Clasping her hands, speaking in a lower tone.*) When I think of Cariston I feel myself a shrine! (*After a moment, impatiently.*) Why does he not save me from myself—take me as my forefathers took the Sabine women?—Oh, the rapture! But he bows before me at a banquet. There are the stateliest dames of Rome resplendent; something within me longs to outshine them all! I hate lentils—I abhor homespun. (*Enter* CORDELIA *with the robe;* FAUSTINA *runs to it and strokes it.*) O you incredible delight! Look how the gold is woven in the hem! How soft the texture of the robe, and how beautiful the color of the gold!

CORDELIA (*significantly*)
The Tyrian purple has a depth of depths—beyond gold.

FAUSTINA
The purple! Aye—the purple!

CORDELIA
Were you a poor man's wife I fear the harshwove stuff would fret your dainty flesh.

FAUSTINA (*impatiently*)

Make haste—it is late—there is no time to lose.

(CORDELIA *drapes the gold-embroidered robe over* FAUSTINA'S *underdress. The sound of a flute played by some passerby comes through the open window.*)

CURTAIN

PART ONE

SCENE TWO

Time: Four hours later.

Setting: A road on the way to Bethlehem. Enter four Shepherds.

FIRST SHEPHERD (*pointing*)
Behold! The town of Bethlehem.

SECOND SHEPHERD
How much farther must we go?

THIRD SHEPHERD
A few furlongs.

SECOND SHEPHERD
The night is cold and I am very weary.

FIRST SHEPHERD
At the end of the journey we shall find our King.

SECOND SHEPHERD (*drawing himself up resolutely*)
Nay, I am not cold—I am not weary—it was my flesh that spoke.

FIRST SHEPHERD (*thoughtfully*)
"Peace and Good Will"—I wonder greatly what that message of the Angel means for men! Methought the Messiah was to come a conqueror.

SECOND SHEPHERD (*reflectively*)
Perchance, one might conquer with Peace and with Good Will— What think you?

FIRST SHEPHERD (*consideringly*)
'Tis by Good Will we conquer the wandering sheep— Fight him—he is lost; gather him in the arms and bear him back to the fold—and he is saved.

FOURTH SHEPHERD
But men are not like that, our hands were taught to fight and our fingers to war.

FIRST SHEPHERD
Perchance, we shall learn a new way.
(*A clanging of armour is heard.*)

ALL THE SHEPHERDS
The Soldiers!—The Soldiers of Rome!

FOURTH SHEPHERD
When will they leave our once-happy country?
(*Four* ROMAN SOLDIERS *enter and walk with swaggering stride from left to right. Three of the* SHEPHERDS *draw back out of their ruthless way; the* FIRST SHEPHERD *stands somewhat dazed in the path of the* SOLDIERS, *one of whom jostles against him.*)

FIRST SHEPHERD (*as if compelled to speak by some inward obligation*)
Sir—we have seen a vision.

FIRST ROMAN SOLDIER (*harshly*)
Vision me no visions—out of my way—back to your flocks!

FIRST SHEPHERD

Of a truth, Sir—we have seen a vision—we were in the fields watching our flocks—

(*The other* SHEPHERDS *come forward eagerly.*)

THIRD SHEPHERD

In the pastures beside the still waters—

FOURTH SHEPHERD

And lo! The Angel of the Lord came upon us and the glory of the Lord shone round about.

FIRST ROMAN SOLDIER (*laughing loudly*)

They are drunk with strong wine.

SECOND ROMAN SOLDIER (*laughing loudly*)

They are mad.

THIRD ROMAN SOLDIER

Come— Let us beat them with stripes—it will sober them and bring them to reason. (*He takes hold of the* FOURTH SHEPHERD *who starts as though to fight.*)

FIRST SHEPHERD

Peace, Brother—fight not; we have the work of the Lord to accomplish.

THIRD ROMAN SOLDIER (*turning to him and laughing scornfully*)

By Bacchus! Do you know what would befall you if you should *try* to fight— You would be broken into bits like this. (*He takes the* SHEPHERD'S *staff and snaps it into several pieces.*)

FIRST SHEPHERD

Oh, my staff and my stay!

FIRST ROMAN SOLDIER (*laughing*)
Have mercy on them; they are sore afraid.

FIRST SHEPHERD (*with dignity*)
Since we have seen the Heavenly Host the Roman Soldiers have ceased to be terrible.

THIRD ROMAN SOLDIER (*advancing threateningly*)
Wait—and see if we be terrible or no.

SECOND ROMAN SOLDIER (*impatiently*)
The hour is late— Come on—

FIRST ROMAN SOLDIER (*impatiently*)
What profit to keep the wine and wenches waiting for us in the town whilst we stop here to crush flies?

FOURTH ROMAN SOLDIER
Why trouble ourselves with madmen when damsels wait for us?
(*Exeunt the* SOLDIERS.)

FIRST SHEPHERD
Peradventure, no man can believe another man's vision.

SECOND SHEPHERD
When God sends His message, He sends it to the poor and lowly shepherds, watching their flocks.

FIRST SHEPHERD
It seemeth very clear that in His sight there is no difference between rich and poor, between high and low degree.

FOURTH SHEPHERD
When men are more like unto God there will be no difference to them.

THIRD SHEPHERD

When men are more like unto God there will be no rich and poor, no high and low.

SECOND SHEPHERD

Come, let us hasten to the Child.

CURTAIN

PART ONE

SCENE THREE

Time: One hour later.

Setting: A stable without the walls, on the road to Bethlehem.

A window of the stable opens upon the road; within, a light is burning; from the road the stone passage-way only may be seen. The voice of the VIRGIN MARY *is heard singing to the Child. The singing is accompanied by a harp; the music of the harp seems to descend from some high place, which gives it a remote and subtle quality.*

THE VIRGIN MARY (*singing*)

Lie still, my little One,
Lie still and sleep;
Mother is watching her dear;
Be not afraid of the cattle and sheep,
God the great Father is near.
Sleep—Sleep.

Lie still; my little One,
Fear not the sheep—
Softly thy Mother-maid sings;
The mighty Jehovah will watch o'er thy sleep,
And shelter thee under His wings.
Sleep—Sleep.

(*Immediately following the song of the* VIRGIN, *the* FOUR SOLDIERS *enter and pass from left to right, singing boisterously.*)

THE SOLDIERS (*singing*)

Hail! Mighty Rome, unconquerable Rome,
Triumphant blow thy trumpets o'er and o'er.
Hail! Mighty Rome, unconquerable Rome,
Thy galleys guard the sea, thy legions line the shore,
Thy glory will abide for evermore.
All hail!

(*Exeunt the* SOLDIERS. *Enter* CARISTON.)

CARISTON

Eternal Zeus! Send thou some balmy medicine to soothe my restless mood.—I left her in the palace with Pompilius! That moment in the garden must content me for to-night—when the moment had passed I would not linger—rather would I wander on the hills communing with the stars than sit longer at an empty feast—to watch my lady laughing with Pompilius.

THE VIRGIN MARY (*singing*)

Oh, wondrous the way, my Son,
The marvellous way of your birth;
Far was the journey, my Son,
From the star-girdled heaven to earth.

CARISTON (*with aroused attention*)

What a sweet voice! Like falling water, musical and clear.

(CARISTON *goes to the window and looks in.*)

THE VIRGIN MARY (*singing*)

Holy the secrets, my Son,
The deep-folded secrets you bring;
A babe in the manger you lie,
But you reign in my heart a king.

CARISTON

The low bent head above her baby boy has a divine sweet purity! Her son a king! O mystery of motherhood! Do not all mothers think themselves mothers of kings?

THE VIRGIN MARY (*chanting softly*)

O God! Thy mercy endureth from generation to generation.

CARISTON

Poor foolish one, naught will endure but our philosophy—the art, the culture of immortal Greece; naught will endure but the great monuments of mind. This blatant Rome will pass away; this mad Judea will pass away and, with it, its Jehovah.

They tell me that these Jews have promise of a Messiah, a Living Word Who will come to show the way— A laugh-arousing prophecy. The world hath groaned until this day for such a Word; the divine Plato prayed for it. Of a surety it would not come unto this ignorant little land.

THE VIRGIN MARY (*chanting softly*)

O Lord! Thy gentleness hath made me great.

CARISTON

I have never seen a more celestial face; a radiance hovers over her. The place seems luminous where she

bends above her child. (*Starting.*) Some prescience stirs within me— This is holy ground; I am not worthy to stand watching, here.

(CARISTON *passes on. The* VIRGIN MARY *sings.*)

THE VIRGIN MARY (*singing*)

Hush—hush—my Darling,
The Inn had no room,
I brought forth my darling
In darkness and gloom.

I sank by the manger,
Where cattle had trod,
Then lo!—In the darkness
Mine eyes beheld God.

(*Whilst* MARY *is singing, the* INNKEEPER'S WIFE *comes from the right, moving stealthily as though fearing discovery; she hears the singing and, creeping to the window of the stable, looks in.*)

THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE (*with emotion*)

It is she! O God of Hosts—she has a son! And I am childless! Welcome the stable and the bed of straw—the cattle and the sheep, with such a crown—O little baby hands!—O little baby lips!—O little baby head to nestle on a mother's breast!

(*With a heart-breaking sob the* INNKEEPER'S WIFE *wraps her veil about her head, and goes out. A party of* JEWS *appear, passing from left to right slowly enough to allow the following conversation to take place.*)

FIRST JEW (*in a grumbling tone*)

Taxes—taxes—always taxes.

SECOND JEW

This new decree of Caesar brings a new burden on the people.

THIRD JEW

Rome is a ravenous wolf; she eats up our land.

SECOND JEW

She eats it and vomits it out to eat again; she sucks the life-blood from our synagogues.

FIRST JEW

Taxes—taxes—always taxes.

SECOND JEW

A little longer we must bear the yoke and then—the Lord God of Israel shall prevail; Rome will be humbled to the dust. The mighty Son of David will arise and lead captivity captive. Messiah the King of Israel will come.

FIRST JEW

He will put proud Rome under his feet.

SECOND JEW

He will be our King— He will be born in splendour and in royal state.

FIRST JEW

Ay, in splendour and in royal state.

(THE JEWS *pass out to the right.*)

THE VIRGIN MARY (*singing*)

I know not how these things may be;
I ponder in my heart
The words the Lord hath said to me;

Emmanuel thou art—
Emmanuel, my little Son—
O morning Star!
Emmanuel.

(*Enter a* JEW, *a Master in Israel.*)

THE JEW

Unhappy town of Bethlehem! Bitter to be borne this Roman arrogance, that flaunts its Roman banners on our fruitful Hill! A light in the stable?—So late! What is wrong with the cattle? (*Looking in at the window.*) A poor woman with a little child—they seem to have fallen asleep. A new-born babe! Doubtless there was no place for her to lie down in peace—our daughters of Israel are crowded out by these Roman profligates who have over-thronged the town. We will find comfort for her, to-morrow.
(THE VIRGIN MARY *murmurs the end of her last song.*)

THE VIRGIN MARY (*singing softly*)

Emmanuel thou art,
Emmanuel, my little Son—
O morning Star!
Emmanuel.

THE JEW (*tenderly*)

She thinks her son Emmanuel!—My friend Eleazar the Pharisee would call that blasphemy—I call it faith; Emmanuel—God with us! God is with every mother when she bears a child. Peradventure, this woman holds a prophetic promise in her heart that her son will be a prophet— So be it— I rejoice to herald him— I care not how he come or who he be—

if but the Lord would send us a new prophet with a new message in this hour of our extremity—this carnal rule of Rome! All things that come from the All-Good are good; *every* Prophet of the Lord hath some message for mankind, notwithstanding my friend Eleazar.

(*Exit* THE JEW. *Enter* FAUSTINA *and* CORDELIA.)

FAUSTINA

What a wondrous night! *I* could be a poet to-night. The litter stifled me! I was like to one in prison. (*Throwing out her arms.*) Come, sweet night-winds —sweep down from the mountain-tops and cool my fevered pulses—throbbing with memories. (*Aside.*) Cariston— Ah! that moment with Cariston in the garden!—It outweighed all the splendour of the feast with Pompilius and my Father.

CORDELIA

What would the noble Callust say, Faustina? The Lady of his House to walk upon the hills of Bethlehem after the Middle Watch of the night!

FAUSTINA

Foolish one—we are safe. Be not vexed, my Cordelia— I *must* walk a pace or two, if you would have me sleep to-night— I would my feet had wings!

CORDELIA (*sharply*)

I would thy head had caution.

FAUSTINA

Caution—against what?

CORDELIA (*looking about uncomfortably*)

Against whatever lurks upon these lonely hills—
'Tis a most God-forsaken country.

FAUSTINA (*reassuringly*)

The slaves follow us with the empty litter; they are guarding us with their eyes. One would think I was a pearl of great price.

CORDELIA

Lady, where in Rome is goodlier pearl of greater price?

FAUSTINA (*affectionately touching* CORDELIA'S *arm*)

Faithful Cordelia.—Hark!

THE VIRGIN MARY (*singing*)

Angels of the Lord,
From the unseen choir,
Angels of the Lord,
Fold your wings of fire
And sing your holy lullabies
To my baby Jesu.

FAUSTINA (*looking in at the window*)

That must be she—the woman who wanted my room! (*Laughing.*) It was for her—for *her* I was to crowd my boxes into my lap! One of the vulgar herd!

THE VIRGIN MARY (*singing*)

Angels of the Lord,
Fold your wings of fire—

FAUSTINA

She has a pretty voice— I will go in.

CORDELIA (*detaining her*)
It is not for noble ladies to linger at stables in the night.

FAUSTINA
Wisdom will die with you, Cordelia— I am going in to talk with that singing wench.

CORDELIA
The hour is late—why should you go?

FAUSTINA
Tell me why Pandora opened the box—curiosity.

CORDELIA
Are you not surfeited with such? You never liked the rabble.

FAUSTINA (*laughing*)
But I never saw a baby in a stable, before.

CORDELIA (*shrugging her shoulders*)
The night air roughens the skin and the foul stench of stables, they say, brings a humour to it.

FAUSTINA (*covering her face and hurrying away*)
Make haste—let us go on! A baby brought forth in a stable—that is poverty indeed! (*Laughing.*) I will tell Petronius—he will make a merry quip of it.
(*Exeunt* FAUSTINA *and* CORDELIA *at the right. The slaves follow with the empty litter. Enter* POMPILIUS.)

POMPILIUS (*conceitedly*)
I threw my dice well, to-night, at the Tetrarch's. Faustina softens to my suit—even were I not what I am with women, Callust desires me and bends that

proud little twig of his my way. By the Gods—she is beautiful; and proud enough to match the House of Plutonius.

(THE VIRGIN MARY *is heard chanting softly.*)

THE VIRGIN MARY (*chanting*)

Lord God of Israel—Thy mercy endureth from everlasting to everlasting!

POMPILIUS (*listening but not looking in at the window*)

More psalms!—This Hebrew chanting on the highways and the byways frets my nerves. There are no Gods—but such as they are—the Gods of Rome alone will remain. The Gods of Rome are names to threaten with—so find I with my soldiers; they will ever be the instrument of Rome—and Rome will endure for ever. This Hebrew rabble whines perpetually of an eternal God! Nothing is eternal but the power of Rome.

(*Exit* POMPILIUS.)

THE VIRGIN MARY (*singing*)

My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.
For He hath regarded the lowliness of His handmaiden;
For, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.
For He that is mighty hath magnified me; and holy is His Name.
And His mercy is on them that fear Him throughout all generations.

(*During the singing of the Magnificat by the* VIRGIN MARY, *the* SHEPHERDS *enter from the right; they*

look in at the window; then kneel, and remain kneeling until the singing is ended; for a moment, there is silence—then an unseen choir of ANGELS *is heard, singing.*)

THE ANGELS (*singing unseen*)

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth Peace, Good Will to men.

CURTAIN

PART TWO

THE INTERLUDE

PART TWO

SCENE ONE

Time: Twelve days later. The hour of sunset.

Setting: The Well of David, town of Bethlehem.

During the scene, the brilliant sunset colors fade away, gradually changing to twilight, the Star of Bethlehem rises in the sky.

The Well is on the edge of an open road. Opposite, a low hill with olive-trees and bushes slopes up from the road; a branch of this road runs on the other side of the hill, but it can be seen only from the top of the hill.

In the foreground is a seat, concealed from the passerby by a thicket of dense green but commanding a view of the Well. Enter several WOMEN, *carrying pitchers on their heads, to draw water.*

THE WOMEN (*singing*)

Come, drink from the Well of Bethlehem,
Our Fathers dug it deep;
Far down in the Well of Bethlehem
The waiting waters leap.

Pure are the waters of Bethlehem,
Pure as a maiden fair;
Come, drink of the waters of Bethlehem,
There is no Marah there.

(*The* WOMEN *draw water from the Well.*)

FIRST WOMAN

By the rod of Aaron—these strangers have turned our town upside-down.

SECOND WOMAN

Crowding throngs have come to Bethlehem. What with the Tetrarch and the taxes our dwelling-places are spoiled of their peace.

THIRD WOMAN (*gaily*)

I am glad. It delights my eyes to watch the soldiers with their bucklers and their breast-plates and their helmets—and the beautiful women with their scarlet and their vermilion, their bracelets and their necklaces.

SECOND WOMAN (*sharply*)

A shameless lot, these Romans! They should wear veils; it is wanton to walk unveiled upon the highway.

THIRD WOMAN (*half aside*)

I would I were a maiden of Rome!

SECOND WOMAN (*with asperity*)

Woe unto a daughter of Israel who would be a Roman maid!

FIRST WOMAN

Did you see the Nazarene woman?

SECOND WOMAN

Which Nazarene woman?

FIRST WOMAN

The one who could find no room in the Inn and brought forth her son in a stable.

SECOND WOMAN

No—did you?

FIRST WOMAN

She is as beautiful as morning; her eyes are as the waters of Hebron and her voice is like the song of the singing-birds at dawn.

FOURTH WOMAN (*scornfully*)

I heard the story from Miriam; she is only a poor carpenter's wife.

FIRST WOMAN

She is of royal descent, of the House of David—she is like one of the white lilies that grow in the clefts of the rock.

THIRD WOMAN

I should think they would have made room for her at the Inn.

SECOND WOMAN

The High Priest himself cannot make room when there is no room—but the Innkeeper is very ill-tempered.

THIRD WOMAN

I like his wife. See! She is coming this way.

(*Enter* THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE

I have been to see the Nazarene woman.

FIRST WOMAN

We were talking of her—do you know her?

THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE

No—but she is a stranger within our gates and she is sick. I brought her some barley cakes with raisins and some swaddling bands for the Child.

SECOND WOMAN

Tell us of the Child!

THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE (*with emotion*)

His eyes are deeper than the everlasting depths, and His little mouth seems made to bless.

FIRST WOMAN

We would see Him—will you take us?

THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE

I must hasten home, but I will walk a few paces with you to show you the way.

(*Exeunt the* WOMEN, *singing. Enter* CARISTON *and* FAUSTINA.)

CARISTON (*pointing to Bethlehem*)

The little town, blushing in the sunset, is like a royal bride arrayed for her bridegroom.

FAUSTINA (*looking around her*)

Ah! There is magic interwoven in this land. Behold the hills! They seem like living friends. Give me to drink, Cariston—I like these way-side wells—they are hospitable.

(CARISTON *gives* FAUSTINA *to drink; he lightly takes her hand and leads her from the Well.*)

CARISTON

Come from the highway to our trysting-place, beneath the shadow of the olive-trees.

(CARISTON *and* FAUSTINA *sit upon the seat, on the other side of the road.*)

CARISTON (*turning to her*)

The little town, glad in the golden light, is fair—but now my fairer Lady, let me look into your eyes!

FAUSTINA (*closing her eyes*)

They have gone—you cannot see them.

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CARISTON

Then, lovely eyelids, I may look on thee.

FAUSTINA (*opening her eyes*)

I am perverse, Cariston.

CARISTON

You are myriad-mooded, April-hearted—so is the Spring.

FAUSTINA (*throwing out her arms, speaking with a deeper meaning*)

I am as myriad-mooded as the sea; outward the sea surges—away—away—farther—farther—

CARISTON (*answering her meaning*)

Inward the sea surges—nearer—nearer—

FAUSTINA (*with a tragic little scowl and an assumed severity of tone*)

It grows angry.

CARISTON (*significantly*)

It is beneficent and kind. (*A nightingale sings in the*

thicket.) Listen to the nightingale, Faustina—it speaks that which I fain would say.

FAUSTINA (*aside*)
I cannot hear the nightingale for the beating of my heart.

CARISTON
Faustina—I love you.

FAUSTINA (*in a low voice surcharged with emotion*)
Oh—!

CARISTON (*taking her hand and kissing it*)
Faustina—come with me to happy-hearted Greece! Come, my Beloved, to my iris-colored shores that wait to welcome you.

FAUSTINA
Cariston—

CARISTON
I will encircle you with ecstasy. You shall fall asleep to harmony—you shall awake to song.

FAUSTINA (*softly*)
Fall asleep to harmony—awake to song—

CARISTON
Will you come—Beloved?

FAUSTINA (*falteringly*)
My Father—

CARISTON (*resolutely*)
I will persuade your Father— Love has a tongue to plead, it will not be gainsaid—my love will find unanswerable arguments.

FAUSTINA (*dreamily*)
Cariston—is this earth or heaven?

CARISTON
Earth, my Beloved, where I am man and you are woman—but also heaven, where the Gods pour out immortal grace for us.
(FAUSTINA *suddenly draws herself away—her mood changes; she starts back and with a wild movement pushes the hair from her eyes.*)

FAUSTINA (*aside*)
O foolish melting mood! I *must* shake you off! (*Aloud.*) Cariston, you know me not.

CARISTON
I love you—love is knowledge.

FAUSTINA (*shaking her head decidedly*)
You know me not.

CARISTON
What man may know you! A spirit of the elements —a creature of ten thousand swift revealings—are you the less for that?

FAUSTINA (*determined to be honest*)
I love the world and the things of the world.

CARISTON
All the world loves you—the things of the world are yours by right.

FAUSTINA (*hesitatingly*)
Greece is so far away—

CARISTON
No place is far from love.

FAUSTINA (*with quick play of change*)
I should rather dance than read poetry.

CARISTON
You may dance.

FAUSTINA
Oh—I would not dance in a field of flowers—I would dance before the Emperor. I love baubles and trinkets —soft stuffs and foolish laughter—I love my Eastern crisping-pins. (*Laughing.*)

CARISTON (*matching her tone*)
Happy crisping-pins!

FAUSTINA (*provokingly*)
And the jeweled bangles that the women of the East jingle in moving.

CARISTON
They jingle out of tune.

FAUSTINA
You are a poet—Sir.

CARISTON
You are a poem—that is a graver fault.

FAUSTINA
A poem?—of which note, of tragedy or comedy?

CARISTON (*considering*)
They lie nearer, each to each, than mortals dream.

FAUSTINA (*lifting her head defiantly*)
Frighten me not with tragedy—I will have none of it.

CARISTON

O Child, laughter and tears spring from the same source.

FAUSTINA

Tears?—Tears are not tragedy—tears are but the rain that shows the colors when the sun shines.

CARISTON (*tenderly*)

Faustina—

FAUSTINA (*aside, falteringly*)

I am forgetting the world. (*Rising suddenly and making an impatient movement as though to throw off a spell.*) I must return to the Inn. It is audacious daring to linger here.

CARISTON (*taking her hand to detain her*)

First—do you love me?

FAUSTINA

No—yes—I know not.

CARISTON

Ask your heart.

FAUSTINA (*mockingly*)

My heart is hidden by my broideries. Are they not marvellously wrought?

(FAUSTINA *draws away her hand and lightly moves to and fro to show her embroideries, dancing a few steps with fascinating grace.* CARISTON, *with sudden intensity, endeavors to take her in his arms.*)

FAUSTINA (*drawing herself up proudly*)

Touch me not.

CARISTON (*stepping back, bowing reverently*)

Forgive my passion, Lady—it mastered my resolve —I will not trouble you—I love you—and I alter not nor change—I will await your coming—to the end.

FAUSTINA (*slowly as though testing him*)

If I should come, I might disjoint your stately rhymes.

CARISTON

If you should come, music would come with you—matching my rhymes with melody. Know you not, my Lady, you walk hand in hand with music?

FAUSTINA (*clapping her hands*)

It is martial music, then—the clang and beating of the drum—I would drown the flute-notes.

CARISTON (*tenderly*)

Verily, you are a child—as light as thistledown—as thought-free as the wind;—but I have looked beneath the mocking play, Faustina; I trust the soul I see—it is as true as truth.

FAUSTINA (*holding out her hand with quick repentance*)

Your poets have well said "Love teaches grace."

CARISTON (*earnestly*)

The days pass swiftly—soon I return to Greece.

FAUSTINA (*as though struggling with conflicting emotions*)

There yet are many days to meet beside the Well.

CARISTON

Faustina—must I go alone?

FAUSTINA (*bewitchingly*)
Ask me not now lest I say yes.

CARISTON
Then will I ask you.

FAUSTINA (*fascinatingly*)
Men are so far from wise; know you not, Sir, a woman's "yes" entreated turns to "no"?

CARISTON
Then I will leave the question to your heart.

FAUSTINA (*playfully*)
It is the wiser way, Sir. (*Aside.*) It is the way of folly—why does he not answer for my heart?
(*There is the sound of the tramp of camels' feet and of singing.*)

FAUSTINA (*with animation*)
Listen—what is that song?

CARISTON
It is of the East—I know it well.

FAUSTINA
I would see who sings.
(FAUSTINA *runs to the top of the hill;* CARISTON *follows.*)

FAUSTINA (*in an interested tone, scanning the road below on the other side*)
They are in royal raiment; they have a splendid bearing and the air of kings.

CARISTON
They are the Magi—disciples of Zoroaster.

FAUSTINA

Your voice pays tribute to the word—are you also of the disciples?

CARISTON

I am a disciple of the Truth, I follow those who seek it under all banners.

FAUSTINA

What do they, here?

CARISTON

I know not—their faces are turned to the heavens—they are following a star.

FAUSTINA (*in a disappointed tone*)

They are dismounting from the camels—they are not coming this way.

CARISTON (*leading* FAUSTINA *down*)

We will wait beneath the olive-tree; they will come when they have watered their camels.

FAUSTINA (*mischievously*)

Is that a lure to keep me, Sir!

CARISTON

Would I could find one; the luminous evening will be starless night when you go.

(*They move to the seat. Again the nightingale sings.*)

CARISTON

Listen to my advocate—let your heart hear its plea.

FAUSTINA (*softly*)

Cariston! Do the violets grow in Greece?

CARISTON

Were they not at home upon our hills they would be born to meet Faustina when she comes.

FAUSTINA

Cariston—

(FAUSTINA *moves nearer to him as if to yield but, at that moment,* POMPILIUS *appears.* FAUSTINA *draws quickly away from* CARISTON *and attempts to veil herself; before her face is entirely covered* POMPILIUS *approaches.*)

POMPILIUS (*with courtly ceremony toward* FAUSTINA, *but ignoring* CARISTON)

It were useless, fair Lady, to veil the face of Minerva; she is known by her presence.

FAUSTINA (*laughing and throwing back her veil*)

I will not attempt it then— Behold Wisdom!—and my Father calls me Folly!

POMPILIUS (*looking significantly at* CARISTON)

Perchance Wisdom hath somewhat still to learn. I saw the impatient Cordelia growing restless—there beneath the trees; I knew her Lady was not far away—but (*Scornfully.*) I did not know she was guarded by a Greek.

CARISTON (*coolly*)

So guarded, Sir Roman, it would be well for no one to approach—save at her pleasure.

POMPILIUS (*very angrily*)

Sir Roman! Insolence! By the Gods!

FAUSTINA (*laughing*)
Not insolence but high tribute to Rome from Greece. (*Turning to* CARISTON.) We are very proud of Rome, Sir.

CARISTON (*with courtesy*)
Rome may be very proud of Rome since it is the home of Faustina.

POMPILIUS (*angrily*)
And if a Greek—

FAUSTINA (*interrupting with a fascinating play of mastery*)
Silence! (*Holding out a hand to each.*) You must be *friends*—Greece is Greece and Rome is Rome—and I am I—you *must* be friends.

CARISTON (*with much grace*)
Your *must*, Lady, is accomplishment.
(CARISTON *holds out his hand to* POMPILIUS *who takes it sullenly.*)

POMPILIUS
Faustina, your Father bade me tell you he awaits you at the Inn.
(FAUSTINA *rises, making a gesture as though to throw off a spell; then laughs.*)

FAUSTINA
How many minutes were you, Pompilius, in remembering the message?

CARISTON
Shall we go, Lady?

POMPILIUS (*with hauteur*)
Come, Faustina.

FAUSTINA (*looking from one to the other*)
There are no dragons in the way—I need no guard. (*Calling.*) Cordelia! (CORDELIA *appears.*) Take me to the Inn, Cordelia.

CORDELIA (*aside impatiently*)
'Tis time!

FAUSTINA (*mischievously holding out her hand to* CARISTON)
I must obey my Father.

CARISTON (*bowing low*)
Farewell.

POMPILIUS (*significantly, aside*)
She must obey her Father. (*Aloud.*) May I follow you, Lady?

FAUSTINA (*going forward with* CORDELIA *and speaking over her shoulder*)
I do not own the roads of Bethlehem.
(*Exeunt* FAUSTINA, CORDELIA *and* POMPILIUS.)

CARISTON (*looking after them*)
Beautiful child—when the spring-time is glad-hearted, many-mooded, we approve—should we condemn a woman that she has the heart of Spring? (CARISTON *is silent for a moment, then, suddenly, starts and looks around.*) Again that mystery—the beating of Unseen wings upon the air!—something brooding in the night! I am not superstitious but since I saw the Mother and her Child my spirit has discerned a mystery.

How long have I searched with passionate asking for the Truth! I worship oftenest at the altar erected to The Unknown God.

I have drunk of the water of philosophy—I have drunk of the fountain of poetry—I have drunk of the river of religion—and yet, I am consumed with longing for the Living Water that will assuage my thirst.

The Gods of Greece are great enough to match our ceremonials—but for the soul athirst for knowledge—peace—rest—they are as dry dust in the mouth—as smoke in the nostrils.

I stand upon the threshold of Faustina's love—If it be denied me—where—where shall I turn? If it be granted me—then must I be in tune with the Invisible to guard my happiness.

O silent Star that shines on Bethlehem! Shall I find peace?—Shall I ever find the Truth?

(*As* CARISTON *stands looking upward, the* WISEMEN *enter and pass, singing.*)

THE WISEMEN (*singing*)

The Star that our Fathers foretold, of old,
Hath come; it is here, shining clear;
We follow it through the night; its light
Leadeth us on, as of old our Fathers foretold,
To the promise, the hope and the King.
Mazda Ahura the Holy, to Thee all praises we sing.

(CARISTON *looks after the* WISEMEN *for a moment and then follows slowly; the Curtain falls as they are still singing—repeating the last line.*)

CURTAIN

PART TWO

SCENE TWO

Time: The day following. Noon.

Setting: A street in Bethlehem.

Enter several women in great excitement, laughing, talking and playing on timbrels raised high over their heads.

FIRST WOMAN

To-day is a golden day—three Kings have come to our town.

SECOND WOMAN

Three Kings from the East; I followed them down the street.

THIRD WOMAN

And so did I! I ran like a doe upon the hills to keep pace with them.

SECOND WOMAN

Miriam said they were going to the Herodian Mount to the Tetrarch—but they went the other way.

FIRST WOMAN

How beautiful were their many-colored garments!

SECOND WOMAN

And their golden ornaments! I like the jingling of the bells upon the camels.

THIRD WOMAN

One of the Kings looked my way.

SECOND WOMAN (*aside*)

She always thinks men look her way if they raise their eyes from the ground. (*Aloud.*) Why are they here?

THIRD WOMAN

Are they to rule us instead of Rome?

FIRST WOMAN

You are as empty-headed as a sparrow. The Romans could not be driven out by a horde of Eastern Kings.

THIRD WOMAN

Do they come from Babylon? I wish I could see them again.

SECOND WOMAN (*laughing*)

You mean you wish their eyes could behold again your beauty.

THIRD WOMAN (*tossing her head*)

You chatter like a swallow or a crane.

FIRST WOMAN

Let us go to the market-place—they may pass by that way.

THIRD WOMAN

Hark! I can hear the bells of the camels.

SECOND WOMAN

Foolishness—you hear the tinkling of your own folly; come, let us hasten to the market-place.

(*Exeunt the* WOMEN. *Enter* CORDELIA *and* THE INN-KEEPER'S WIFE.)

CORDELIA (*haughtily*)
What a flutter for three kings!

THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE
Did you see them? They were splendidly arrayed.

CORDELIA
I troubled not to turn my head. We have kings and splendour in Rome.

THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE (*seriously*)
Cordelia, I would speak with you.

CORDELIA
So you have said—I came from the Inn to hear you.

THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE (*earnestly*)
Your Lady wanders about the hills of Bethlehem too much for her good.

CORDELIA (*sharply*)
What threatens her? Have a care!

THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE
Patience, Cordelia. Keep her from the hills after the dew falls at eventide.

CORDELIA (*impatiently*)
Woman, I pray you put a yoke upon the eagle and, when it is accomplished, come to me and tell me how to keep Faustina from her will.

THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE (*lowering her voice, speaking cautiously and hesitatingly*)
Sickness and plague stalk there for the stranger who knows not our customs and our ways. I have watched your noble maiden coming and going from the Inn—she is not well.

CORDELIA (*impatiently*)
Peace, Woman, speak no prophecy.

THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE
Her lovely face is as white as wool.

CORDELIA (*sharply*)
She was ever fair.

THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE
Take her home to Rome—she is sick.

CORDELIA (*angrily*)
Silence! You will bewitch her. By the Gods! I think it is from revenge.

THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE (*with dignity*)
What have I to do with revenge? I am a daughter of Zion—revenge belongeth to my God.

CORDELIA (*turning angrily*)
Why do you drag me from the Inn to whisper in my ear an evil word?

THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE
I would warn you in time, Cordelia.

CORDELIA (*with irritation*)
Warning foreshadows doom; withhold it until I ask. (CORDELIA *moves away. Aside tenderly.*) O Faustina —Faustina—have I not seen the pallor on your face? Have I not essayed to curb your wilful wanderings? It were as easy to stem the Tiber when it begins to rise.
(*Exit* CORDELIA.)

THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE (*looking after* CORDELIA)
"Whoso stoppeth the ears to the warning of a friend

shall be overtaken by evil—and there shall be no remedy."

(*Exit* THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE. *Enter* CARISTON *and* GLAUCUS.)

GLAUCUS

When do you set sail for Greece?

CARISTON

I wait upon the stars.

GLAUCUS

I thought Cariston waited not for favourable signs!

CARISTON

I mean not the stars in the firmament; there are more potent auguries.

GLAUCUS (*suddenly*)

Cariston! Beware of Pompilius.

CARISTON

Pompilius?

GLAUCUS

Ay, Pompilius. He hates you!

CARISTON

A man's hate cannot touch another man.

GLAUCUS

But his dagger may.

CARISTON

And wherefore should Pompilius hate me?

GLAUCUS

You are Cariston the poet.

CARISTON

And he is Pompilius, akin to Caesar.

GLAUCUS

Apollo outranks Augustus.

CARISTON

I have no fear of daggers, Glaucus; they are cheap weapons— But it is true Pompilius has power to deal me a deeper wound than any dagger may—ay, a mortal wound.

GLAUCUS

The beautiful Faustina?

CARISTON

Glaucus, I love Faustina. Why should I hide from you a fact that is the benediction of my soul— I love her and I hope—but a Father's ruthless will— Augustus Caesar and the power of Rome make a strong phalanx to bear upon a maiden's heart.

GLAUCUS

Has not our own poet, Cariston, said—

"Great love is stronger than the embattled hosts
And mightier than the armies of the world!"

CARISTON

It was the man who sang; to the woman, perchance, it may be more difficult to confront the host.

GLAUCUS (*in a low voice*)

The arrogant Pompilius comes.

(*Enter* POMPILIUS *who looks scornfully at* CARISTON.)

POMPILIUS (*insolently*)

Are you making rhymes—Sir Poet?

CARISTON (*coolly*)
I am; I am trying to fit Politeness to Pompilius—but they do not rhyme.

POMPILIUS (*sharply*)
It were better to rhyme Cariston with Greece.

CARISTON
When the stars are favourable I so intend.

POMPILIUS (*significantly*)
Wait not for the stars—perchance, it might storm.

CARISTON (*also significantly*)
I could ever steer in an angry sea.

POMPILIUS (*with deeper meaning, measuring his words*)
I *think* the Emperor has work for you to do in Greece.

CARISTON (*smiling*)
I doubt not, if you think it—you know the royal mind.

POMPILIUS (*aside*)
In this, at least, I know it.
(*Exit* POMPILIUS.)

CARISTON (*calmly*)
Glaucus, that is my banishment.

GLAUCUS (*with agitation*)
It is your banishment— Pompilius is in favour now; he will inform the Emperor, and Augustus *will* have work for you in Greece—far from Faustina.

CARISTON
Many weeks must pass ere he can communicate with

Rome. And still we meet beside the Well. (*Aside.*) It is not Pompilius I fear, it is not Augustus Caesar; it is the light laughter of her virgin heart that knows not its own secret.

(*Exeunt* CARISTON *and* GLAUCUS. *The women re-enter and pass with timbrels.*)

CURTAIN

PART TWO

SCENE THREE

Time: Several weeks later. Twilight.

Setting: The Well of David.

FAUSTINA, *heavily veiled, stands by the seat; she throws back her veil.*

FAUSTINA (*passionately*)

Alone!—here in our trysting-place— Alone! He has gone— Ten days—ten interminable days! And on that fatal day of his going, I held the balances within my hand and knew the truth.

I have woven the web—it holds me fast. My Father is content; I have obeyed him and he blessed me. Blessed me! (*Bitterly.*) I have betrayed my heart for gold, I have sold myself for pearls—(*Pulling at her necklace of pearls.*) they strangle me—I cannot breathe.

I have escaped from the Inn— I have eluded them all —the watchful eyes that keep me prisoner— I have come for one moment's refuge to our trysting-place.

Is it a dream?—If I climb the hill shall I see him coming again to meet me? Too late—too late—he speeds to Greece and I am here—betrothed to Pompilius! *Betrothed to Pompilius!* I must say the

words over until I learn them as a child learns her new task. (FAUSTINA *goes up the hill behind the seat from which she can command a longer stretch of road.*) The hills are silent and the world is grey—I am going away to Rome, but my heart will keep the tryst. In my dreams I shall stand upon these hills of Bethlehem, watching, watching! Oh, nevermore—nevermore—

(*The voice of the* VIRGIN MARY *is heard singing as she passes near unseen.* FAUSTINA *starts and listens intently.*)

THE VIRGIN MARY (*singing in the distance*)

Lie still, my little One,
Lie still and sleep;
Fear not the darkness of night;
Jehovah, the Father, my baby will keep,
He is our Way, and our Light,
Sleep— Sleep.

FAUSTINA (*looking down the road*)

It is the Mother and the Child—the one who sang within the stable that night—so long ago, when I was not betrothed to Pompilius. Her husband walks beside her; she sits upon the foal as though she were a queen— She *is* a queen—there is no realm for woman but her love;—this I have learned too late—How yearningly she guards the child upon her breast! She bends down toward her lord and he looks up to her! Though they are passing on the open road, they seem to be in some secret place alone, together. O love! It is better to wander fainting in the desert as that mother wanders led by her lord,

her child upon her breast, than to be the wife of Caesar. Cariston— O Cariston!

(FAUSTINA *leans against a tree with her head buried in her arms. The clanking of armour is heard, and some soldiers pass by on the other side of the hill, singing.*)

THE SOLDIERS (*singing*)

Hail mighty Rome, unconquerable Rome!
Thy glory will abide for evermore—
All Hail!

FAUSTINA (*lifting her head and recovering her self-possession*)

I am a Roman. I am to be the wife of a Roman warrior; (*Bitterly.*) I, too, must wear my armour—let me gird it on; smiles for a shield and gaiety for my sword.

(*Enter* POMPILIUS. FAUSTINA *starts down the hill and sees* POMPILIUS. FAUSTINA *tries to shrink back; he sees the retreating figure and peers searchingly at her.*)

POMPILIUS (*in a voice of surprise*)

Faustina—by the Gods!

FAUSTINA (*coming down; smiling*)

Greeting, Pompilius.

POMPILIUS (*sharply*)

It ill beseems the bride of the House of Plutonius to wander unattended.

FAUSTINA (*lifting her head proudly*)

And wherefore?

POMPILIUS

She should not forget her rank.

FAUSTINA (*with dignity*)

The House of Callust needs no lessons from the House of Plutonius.

POMPILIUS (*in a conciliatory voice, putting out his hand to detain her*)

Be not angry, my beautiful one; I would but guard my treasure. Sit with me, awhile.

(POMPILIUS *attempts to lead* FAUSTINA *to the seat.*)

FAUSTINA (*aside*)

No, no—not there—not there! (*Aloud.*) Let us sit here, beside the Well.

(FAUSTINA *seats herself on the edge of the Well.*)

POMPILIUS (*ingratiatingly*)

When will you learn to love?

FAUSTINA (*starting, and speaking with much emotion*)

Learn to love?

POMPILIUS

Thou art as cold as snow upon the Apennines. Ten days we are betrothed and yet thou hast not granted me even thy lovely finger-tips to kiss.

FAUSTINA (*imploringly, leaning forward*)

Bear with me, Pompilius, for a little while—when we are wedded, then I will learn. Oh, I will learn!

POMPILIUS

I have laid a palace at your feet, vast wealth, and much fame—may I not claim my due?

FAUSTINA (*haughtily, drawing back*)
Is it a bargain, Sir?

POMPILIUS
Toss not that golden head disdainfully, yield me your lips—your beauty sends a fire through my veins.

FAUSTINA (*earnestly*)
Pompilius, I would not be loved for my beauty.

POMPILIUS
Your beauty is yourself.
(POMPILIUS *moves toward* FAUSTINA.)

FAUSTINA
Pompilius— Have mercy!

POMPILIUS
You will know what mercy is when you feel my lips meet yours—it is my right—you are mine—all mine —naught in the compass of heaven or hell can come between us now.

FAUSTINA (*drawing herself up proudly*)
My will can come between us—as I choose.

POMPILIUS
Your will is mine, to control.

FAUSTINA (*haughtily*)
Not yet, Pompilius!

POMPILIUS (*coming nearer and looking at her unpleasantly*)
I know full well what comes between us—it is Cariston the Greek— *Soon there will be an end of that.*

FAUSTINA (*trembling*)
What mean you, Pompilius?

POMPILIUS (*significantly*)
There are many adverse winds which blow inland from the Ægean.

FAUSTINA (*falteringly*)
Pompilius—my heart is faint—Cariston— O Pompilius!
(FAUSTINA *falls back unconscious against the Well.*)

POMPILIUS (*in a frightened voice*)
Faustina! Faustina! She answers not— Is she dead? (*Taking her hand.*) No—she has but swooned. (*Impatiently.*) A fainting maiden by a way-side well! This is a dilemma for a soldier— What shall I do? Help—help—
(*Enter* CORDELIA *who is searching for* FAUSTINA.)

CORDELIA
Is my Lady here?

POMPILIUS
The Gods be praised! Quick—she is here—in dire need.
(CORDELIA *hastens to* FAUSTINA *and kneels beside her.*)

CORDELIA
What have you done to her?—Sweet Lady, here is Cordelia; open your eyes— It is this tainted air; she has drooped these two days past— Would to the Gods we were in Rome! (CORDELIA *bends over her*

and takes FAUSTINA *in her arms.*) This is beyond my skill— Make haste—bring me help.

POMPILIUS (*confusedly*)
I would I knew what to do.

CORDELIA (*impatiently*)
Then do it—quickly.
(THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE *appears in the distance.*)

POMPILIUS (*calling*)
Woman! Woman! Come!

CORDELIA (*calling*)
Make haste, my Lady swoons.
(THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE *hurries forward and bends over* FAUSTINA *with* CORDELIA. THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE, *rising suddenly, speaks in startled tones.*)

THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE
O God of Israel—the curse!

POMPILIUS (*starting*)
The curse?

CORDELIA (*turning sharply*)
The curse!

THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE
The curse of Syria—leprosy.
(CORDELIA, *who is chafing* FAUSTINA'S *hands, turns, making an excited gesture motioning away* THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE.)

CORDELIA (*excitedly*)
Away—away—you evil Prophetess! You have bewitched my Lady with your croaking words.

THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE (*with dignity*)

It is the curse of the country, not of her. I warned you to beware—I would it were not so. Alas! I but say what I see.

POMPILIUS

What see you?

THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE

The first beginning of the doom—the little speck that tells the fatal truth.

POMPILIUS (*frightened*)

You fool— Look where she lies! She is as beautiful as a carven goddess.

THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE

This swoon comes not from the leprosy—the leprosy has but just begun—she still is beautiful and will be many days—some terror has palsied her heart and made her faint—but, in tending her for the swoon, I saw another thing—I saw the little speck no bigger than a mote beneath the shadow of her hair —the grey forerunner of what is to be!

POMPILIUS (*in craven terror, aside*)

I touched her hand! Immortal Gods—protect me! (POMPILIUS *slinks away in a cowardly manner.*)

CORDELIA (*gathering* FAUSTINA *closer in her arms*)

No, my Faustina— It is all a lie— A Hebrew lie— A lie!—A lie! (*Turning to* THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE.) Woman, what know you of a spot upon the skin? Bring a physician!

THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE

I will bring a physician, but I know—too well I know—have I not watched beside the awful thing!

CORDELIA (*much excited*)

Yea, verily, I doubt not you know every evil well—but Roman maidens are not Hebrew maids—you cannot judge them by your ghastly signs.

THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE

Peradventure, I cannot.

CORDELIA (*impatiently*)

Make haste— In the name of all your Gods of Israel, bring a physician.

THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE

I go— O merciful Jehovah—grant it may not be! (THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE *hastens away.*)

CURTAIN

PART THREE

THE REVELATION

PART THREE

SCENE ONE

Time: Thirty years later. Sunset.

Setting: The Well of David, as before.

When the curtain rises all is silent on the stage. From behind the bushes rises a figure in sackcloth, the face and head entirely covered with a grey veil, which falls in long folds to the hem of the dress. The figure produces the effect of a personification of despair—it is FAUSTINA.

FAUSTINA

Inexorable Gods! I am accursed. Flesh crumbles, bit by bit, in hideous leprosy; yet still my soul lives on, like a wild thing chained in a black pit. The wrong I did Cariston is avenged. How long have I been buried in these hills? Thirty years!—Thirty years— Eternity of horror! If I had obeyed my Father and returned to Rome, at least I would have had a home—but I would not go—wherefore I am a wandering alien who has learned that life is death.

What is beauty?—A thing to be eaten by leprosy! What is wealth?—It crumbles into dust! What is pride of birth?—It is a brazen shield that falls to leave one outcast! What are the Gods?—They are

as pitiless as stone. One light there is—but one! Cariston! Through the long blackness the thought of him has glimmered like a star. And at last—at last I shall look upon his face! He comes to Bethlehem, bound for Jerusalem. Now all men know whence he comes and where he passes, for his fame heralds him. I have crept from my hiding-place, my leper-hole, to look upon thee— O my Beloved! (FAUSTINA *lifts a corner of her veil, not disclosing her face, and under its protection gazes down the road.* CARISTON *appears in the distance walking with* GLAUCUS *his friend.*) He comes—he comes—changed—but the same. He must not see me—he must not see me— (*Crouching behind the bushes.*) I am a leper—a leper—a leper!

(*Enter* GLAUCUS *and* CARISTON.)

CARISTON

Fain would I sit upon this memory-haunted seat.

GLAUCUS (*drawing a long breath*)

And fain would I. You who scorn mules and litters know not how many furlongs make a mile.

(CARISTON *and* GLAUCUS *seat themselves.*)

CARISTON (*smiling*)

Poor Glaucus! have I wearied you? In turn I will refresh you. (CARISTON *rises and goes over to the Well; he draws water and brings it to* GLAUCUS *in a gourd he finds beside the Well.*) Take, drink this water from the Well of Bethlehem; there is no sweeter potion in the world.

(GLAUCUS *rises and, taking the gourd, bows acknowledgment.*)

GLAUCUS

I drink to thee—Poet of Greece! (*Drinks.*)

CARISTON (*taking the gourd*)

Forgive me, Glaucus—I drink to memory— (CARISTON *drinks and empties some water upon the ground.*) And now, to thee—friend of my halcyon days! (CARISTON *drinks again; they seat themselves.* CARISTON *starts, looking around as though conscious of something unseen.*) Some mystery is near.

GLAUCUS

Poets walk ever near to mystery.

(CARISTON *is silent for a moment as if thinking.*)

CARISTON

Verily, I walked near to mystery this morning; I saw a Man.

GLAUCUS (*smiling*)

Mysteries lie more in women.

CARISTON (*solemnly*)

Jest not—I saw a Man who stands apart from men.

GLAUCUS

Where?

CARISTON

I came up from the boat and found a multitude gathered by the way-side and in the midst sat a Man, speaking; He spoke as one having authority, and yet, so simply withal, a child could have comprehended Him.

As I drew near and stood before Him it seemed that He was speaking to me alone—and then, straight-

way, I knew that each one in the multitude thought He spoke to him alone.

GLAUCUS

I have heard rumour of a Nazarene who is stirring up the Jews with new doctrines. We will go to hear Him together and weigh His arguments.

CARISTON

This Man has no doctrines and no arguments.

GLAUCUS

Of what school is He?

CARISTON

That is the best of all— He is of no school.

GLAUCUS

No school—no doctrines—no arguments? What has He?

CARISTON (*with sudden prescience*)

Peradventure, He has the Living Water for which my soul thirsts.

GLAUCUS (*aside*)

And can it be that a poet, who pours forth freely for mankind, himself may be athirst? (*Aloud.*) I hear that there is much anger concerning this Man.

CARISTON

Why?

GLAUCUS

He claims to be the Son of God.

CARISTON

A high claim, Glaucus, but a true one—we are all sons of God.

GLAUCUS

But these Hebrews declare their Jehovah would not brook the claim.

CARISTON (*shrugging his shoulders*)

Zeus—Jehovah—Jupiter—they are all only different names for the Infinite Everlasting One—and we are sons of that Infinite One, else were creation a vain show.

GLAUCUS

How may we know?

CARISTON

By keeping the divine within us like a clear light.

GLAUCUS (*hesitatingly*)

And yet, Cariston—

CARISTON

Ah, the old days when we discussed philosophy in Greece! How keen this brings the memory back like the snap of the salt sea—but not to-day, Glaucus, by your grace—the hours speed on and I need quick counsel of your wisdom.

GLAUCUS

Enough—speak on.

CARISTON

Do you remember Faustina of the House of Callust?

GLAUCUS

Could one forget her incomparable beauty! Nor do I forget the anger that swept like a whirlwind in my heart to her, when she was false to you—

CARISTON (*interrupting*)
Peace, Glaucus.

GLAUCUS
She scorned the libation that you offered her.

CARISTON
She was a daughter of the Gods—come down to earth; she lost herself amongst the market-places; what does that prove?

GLAUCUS
Generous one!

CARISTON
She was so young, a very child, my sombre wooing frightened her wild mood—she loved gay colors, trinkets, gauds and merriment—but her soul was true as the fragrant spring-time, a flowering promise of infinite fulfilment.

GLAUCUS
Pompilius left her to her fate when she was stricken with leprosy, did he not?

CARISTON
The everlasting curses of the Gods rest on his most perfidious head.

GLAUCUS
You sought her, then?

CARISTON
It is of that, I fain would speak—through days and months, I sought for her in Rome.

GLAUCUS

In Rome—not in Judea?

CARISTON

Wise Glaucus, your wit outspeeds my duller sense.

GLAUCUS

Was she here?

CARISTON

Her Father was in Rome; I could not think that he, the mighty Callust, would have left his noble daughter in this place anathema! When I heard the story of her woe, I hastened to Rome—I went to her Father—I asked for news of her. Callust was adamantine in his secrecy; finally he said these words: "She is within my care—let that suffice you." I read a literal meaning in those words and sought her everywhere in Rome, within the gates, without the walls—I sought her but I found her not. At last, I relinquished my quest; but when her Father died and his wealth was usurped, I sought again for her, disquiet in my heart lest she should be in need. And then I heard from him who sat in her Father's seat—whose obligation was to her—that she of very surety was dead.

GLAUCUS

Dead—doubtless, long ago.

CARISTON

No, Glaucus, she is alive; else would I not be here.

GLAUCUS (*much surprised*)

Alive—after the years!

CARISTON

I will not weary you with all the tale; in Greece a rumour reached me that Faustina was alive in Syria. Alive—a leper—and uncared for since her Father's death. My heart outran the ship I took upon the moment. I thank the Gods, my friend, we met upon the way. I need a guide—for I know not the East and I must search for her.

GLAUCUS

I will guide you—if you are resolved.

CARISTON

Resolved!

GLAUCUS (*in astonishment*)

Do you love her still?

CARISTON

Love is immortal!—He who knows not constancy has never known love.

GLAUCUS

But thirty years!—It is unthinkable!

CARISTON

A thousand years are as a day to one who loves.

GLAUCUS (*meditatively*)

I thought I loved, once!

CARISTON (*smiling grimly*)

You were mistaken, Glaucus, if you love not to-day. Fancies are manifold but Love is not granted to every one—when it comes, it enters the heart's temple and abides for ever.

GLAUCUS

If you should find her?

CARISTON

For me happiness—for her a home.

GLAUCUS (*in amazement*)

You would shelter leprosy?

CARISTON

I would shelter her; if she has leprosy that is Fate's affair.

GLAUCUS

Have you counted the cost?

CARISTON (*smiling*)

I have—on one side, long loneliness—and on the other, love and care for her.

GLAUCUS (*impatiently*)

On one side, acclaimed lord of the lyre, king of the feast, women of beauty for the asking and Caesar's hand outstretched; on the other—leprosy!

CARISTON

I take the odds. Let us journey onward; I will unfold my plan upon the way.

(*They rise.*)

GLAUCUS

Madness— Madness!

CARISTON (*laying his hand upon* GLAUCUS)

Bear with thy mad friend a while—my Glaucus!

GLAUCUS (*with emotion*)

Ay, it is madness but, by the Gods, it is a divine madness!

(*Exeunt* CARISTON *and* GLAUCUS. *Slowly* FAUSTINA *rises from behind the bushes and stands in majestic dignity of sorrow.*)

FAUSTINA

O Mother of the Gods! I did not speak! I have atoned! I lured him not to leprosy—his laurel will not be defiled! I must be gone—I know my man of valour!—there is no hole in Bethlehem so deep he would not find me—no hiding-place secure from his love-penetrating eyes. I will flee—out to the open spaces. My ghastly armour will protect me. I will go to Egypt. Never again to look upon these hills that saw my agony—beheld my joy— Woe— Woe— Woe.

(FAUSTINA *sinks shuddering and sobbing to the ground. From the right comes a young Hebrew* MAIDEN, *dressed in white; her face is radiant with happiness; she suddenly sees* FAUSTINA, *and goes toward her with hands outstretched.*)

THE MAIDEN

My Sister—

FAUSTINA (*holding up her hand in warning*)

Unclean— Unclean!

THE MAIDEN

I have no fear, Sister.

FAUSTINA

Unclean— Unclean!

THE MAIDEN
I bring you good tidings.

FAUSTINA (*lifting her head, speaking in a solemn tone*)
I am a leper.

THE MAIDEN
So was I.

FAUSTINA
You!

THE MAIDEN (*holding out her arms*)
Yea, I was a leper— Look at this pretty flesh; is it not fair? It was a foul thing. Look in mine eyes —are they not bright and clear? My Mother says they are as her little baby's when I was upon her breast; they were as dull as water in the ditch.

FAUSTINA (*trembling, in a doubting tone*)
And you were healed?

THE MAIDEN
I was healed.

FAUSTINA
By what physician—in what land?

THE MAIDEN
In Galilee, when the moon was rounded last.

FAUSTINA (*in a tense voice*)
Who is the physician?

THE MAIDEN
I know not, but this I know—that whereas I was a leper, now I am whole; whole—whole—O God of Israel—all whole.

FAUSTINA

And you know not His name—His fame?

THE MAIDEN

He has no fame—and I remember only His eyes. He told me to go show myself to the High Priest and when I went back He was gone; He is coming, today, to Bethlehem; Jacob, my brother, saw Him on the road, hitherward bound, with a throng of followers. Soon He will be here. Come with me and we will seek Him together. I should like to walk always near Him. Oh, now I remember His name—it is Jesus. He is a poor man but He looks like a king. Some one told me that He was born in this town of Bethlehem—in a manger—thirty years ago.

FAUSTINA (*with agitation*)

Here—in Bethlehem—in a manger! Thirty years ago!—I may not go with you.

THE MAIDEN

Why not?

FAUSTINA

I am old—too old—I cannot walk.

THE MAIDEN

"Your youth shall be renewed as the eagle's;" you "shall run and not be weary;" you "shall walk and not faint;" that is the promise.

FAUSTINA (*trembling*)

I have not told you the true reason I may not go. Hush— I will tell you— I laughed at Him.

THE MAIDEN (*indignantly*)

You laughed at Him!

FAUSTINA

Oh, not now—that was thirty years ago, when He was a baby; His Mother waited helpless at the door— I refused to give her shelter. Then I saw her with her baby in the manger— I despised them—and— I laughed.

THE MAIDEN

Be not afraid— He will not condemn you. He never condemns any one—only the liars and hypocrites. All the sinners love Him, and all the poor and the little children— Come!

FAUSTINA

He was a little child and I laughed at Him.

THE MAIDEN

Tell Him so. Nay, you need not tell Him— He will understand and forgive without any words. When He healed me there was a secret in my heart— He knew it, and yet He healed me.

FAUSTINA

He must be a great physician—or a great magician.

THE MAIDEN

I know not what He is, but this one thing I know; that, whereas I was a leper, now I am whole.

FAUSTINA

Peradventure, He will not heal me— It may be that my doom was sent for punishment.

THE MAIDEN (*shaking her head*)

When you see His face, you will know that could not be. He never punishes— He is Love.

FAUSTINA (*trembling*)

Love?—Doth He love the sinner?—The leper?

THE MAIDEN

Yes!—so very much that the sinner turns away from sin—and the leper is healed.

FAUSTINA (*rising*)

I will go with you. (*Holding up her hand, warningly.*) Keep off— I am unclean.

THE MAIDEN (*putting her arm around* FAUSTINA)

I have no fear, Sister.

(*Exeunt* FAUSTINA *and* THE MAIDEN.)

CURTAIN

PART THREE

SCENE TWO

Time: Four weeks later. Afternoon.

Setting: The scene, the same as before. As the action of the scene progresses the sun sets and the sky is flushed with color. Enter several women, bearing pitchers on their heads, to draw water; and several children. With THE WOMEN *is* THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE *who is now old.*

THE WOMEN (*singing*)

O fairer than gems for adorning,
Bright bangles with tinkling bell,
Is the sparkling dew of the morning,
And the crystal drops from the well.

O fairer than topaz, the noontide,
With the shimmering sun on high,
The blossoms that bloom by the way-side
And the beautiful blue of the sky.

O fairer than treasures of story
Is the glow of the golden light,
The splendour of sunset glory
And the glimmering stars of night.

(THE WOMEN *take the pitchers from their heads and draw water, as they talk.*)

FIRST WOMAN

He has gone.

SECOND WOMAN

Who?

FIRST WOMAN

Jesus of Nazareth.

THIRD WOMAN

No man ever spake as He spoke.

SECOND WOMAN

My husband says He is a pestilent fellow, a friend of sinners.

FIRST WOMAN

Your husband is your husband—but do pestilent fellows heal the sick—raise the dead?—bring gladness to the heart?

SECOND WOMAN

Don't fling your wrath at me; I have not seen Him; I but say what my husband said—his word is good—he is a Pharisee.

FOURTH WOMAN

I saw this Jesus— He makes me think of the prophets we hear of in the Scriptures.

FIRST WOMAN

He is not so proud as the prophets. He speaks to every one with loving kindness and receives the poor as if they were of great account.

THIRD WOMAN

He blesses the little children.

FIRST CHILD (*coming forward*)
He blessed me— I love Him very much.

SECOND CHILD (*coming forward*)
I love Him, too; when I am a man I am going to find Him and live with Him.

ALL THE CHILDREN
And so am I!

SECOND WOMAN (*impatiently*)
Stop your prattle! Stop!

FOURTH WOMAN
I think He is the prophet Elias come back.

THIRD WOMAN
I think He is John the Baptist.

THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE (*raising her hands reverently and speaking solemnly*)
He is the Son of God.

SECOND WOMAN (*startled*)
The Son of God?

THIRD WOMAN
The Son of God?

THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE
He is the Son of God.

THIRD WOMAN
I call that blasphemy. Come, let us hasten—it is late —we cannot stand chattering here all day.
(*Exeunt* THE WOMEN, *singing.*)

THE WOMEN (*singing*)

The swallows nest in the eaves,
The sun shines warm on the lea,
The little birds sing 'mid the leaves
Of the grey-green olive tree.

We weave and we spin all day,
Well-filled is our flaxen store,
And the happy children play
By the vine-embowered door.

(*The* WOMEN *pass out. Enter* CARISTON.)

CARISTON

Again this place with all its memories, the carpet of innumerable flowers, the azure dome, the crescent of the hills—the vision of her face.

My quest is unaccomplished—she is not here nor yet in Judea. They tricked me with false rumour. She is dead! If I could but have found you, my Beloved, solaced your pain and comforted your heart!

(CARISTON *leans his head upon his hand. A woman appears upon the hill, coming from behind the bushes; she is dressed in a tunic of spotless white and her head is covered with a long white transparent veil; she stands silent; then, lifting her veil, leans forward and looks with emotion upon the bowed figure of* CARISTON. *It is* FAUSTINA, *glowing with renewed health in full beauty of maturity; a radiant freshness shines about her, a renewed youth; not the youth of girlhood but the renewed youth of the spirit which vivifies her with exceeding beauty.*)

FAUSTINA (*softly*)

Cariston—

(CARISTON *turns and looks in the direction of the voice; he sees* FAUSTINA, *passes his hand over his eyes, starts to his feet, then sinks back on the seat.*)

FAUSTINA
Cariston—

CARISTON (*in a voice of awe*)
Faustina! Risen from the dead—
(FAUSTINA *comes slowly down the hill, smiling upon* CARISTON *as she comes; he looks at her in awed wonder.*)

CARISTON (*whispering, as if fearing she would vanish*)
Are you a phantom?

FAUSTINA (*coming nearer and laying her hand tenderly upon* CARISTON)
Feel my hand, is it not warm?

CARISTON (*looking up at her*)
O long sought-for, dearly-worshipped—are you here?

FAUSTINA
Because you sought for me, I came—because you love me, I am here.
(CARISTON *rises and stands regarding* FAUSTINA *wonderingly; in a low uncertain voice he speaks her name.*)

CARISTON
Faustina—

FAUSTINA
When you talked with Glaucus, I was crouching behind those bushes.

CARISTON (*in a whisper, as if to himself*)
Ah!

FAUSTINA
I saw you—heard your words—but—I was a leper.

CARISTON (*still dazed*)
Deeper the mystery.

FAUSTINA
Did I not love you—O Beloved! I made no sign. I heard you say that you would take me home. I gripped the ground—my love for you was stronger than myself— I let you pass— I turned to flee that you should find me not. Then came a Hebrew maid who told me of One who was the Master of the curse—

CARISTON (*interrupting*)
The Christ? I have seen Him.

FAUSTINA
I arose— I went to Him— He touched me— I was healed. Doubting I went, doubting I stood before Him; now I could doubt the universe, the Gods of Rome, but I could not doubt Him. Oh, never Him!

CARISTON
It is beyond belief!

FAUSTINA
So said I to the Maiden, as we went—but, behold me! I am here and I am healed.

CARISTON (*as though disbelieving his own words*)
You are here—and you are healed!

FAUSTINA

I would not see you until I had confirmed my cure. I sought the great Roman physician—he would not believe I had been a leper. To-day, I heard that you were bound for Bethlehem. I knew that you would enter by the Eastern gate—that you would rest awhile upon our trysting-seat. From the hill I watched you come. All my heart made haste to meet you on the road—but I waited, hidden in the shadow, until we were alone. Cariston—once again we meet beside the Well.

CARISTON

Where we met so long ago—

FAUSTINA (*remorsefully*)

Where we parted.

CARISTON (*tenderly*)

No more to part. (*Passing his hand over her reverently.*) No phantom—but a woman.

FAUSTINA

Cariston—

CARISTON

At last—Faustina—I shall lead you unto Greece! (*Taking her hands and studying her face.*) O beauty of the Gods! You are as dewy fair as Aphrodite when she rose reborn.

FAUSTINA (*earnestly*)

I was reborn, Cariston, in spirit and in flesh.

CARISTON

Verily, this Man seemeth as a God, holding in His hand the issues of Life.

FAUSTINA (*solemnly*)
The issues of Eternal Life.

CARISTON
It is a miracle.

FAUSTINA
No, not a miracle but nature's deeper truth; and the best of all—this truth is not for me alone, but for the whole wide world for evermore. Pain is conquered; the sting of death is gone; no one need ever suffer any more.

CARISTON (*taking her hand*)
My Love—my Love—

FAUSTINA (*tremulously*)
After the years—and years!
(*At that moment there comes a sound of singing from a band of religious Jewish women who are passing, out of sight, on the other side of the hill.*)

THE VOICES (*singing*)
In Israel shall be born a Son. And His name shall be called Emmanuel.

CARISTON (*as if startled by a new thought*)
Emmanuel—God with us. A God come down to earth!

FAUSTINA (*with sudden illumination*)
Cariston, it is HE!

THE VOICES (*rising to a triumphant climax*)
And His Name shall be called Emmanuel.

CURTAIN

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